

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 02656 280859Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----060235 280902Z /14

O 280837Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1527
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 2656

EXDIS

CAIRO FOR ASS'T SECRETARY ATHERTON

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PGOV IS JO EG XF US
SUBJ: CONVERSATIONS WITH PERES AND EBAN CONCERNING RES 242
AND CURRENT STATE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

1. ATHERTON AND I MET PRIVATELY WITH SHIMON PERES IN JERUSALEM FEB 27 FOR A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATING SITUATION. MOST OF THE CONVERSATION CONSISTED OF PERES RECOUNTING HIS IMPRESSIONS OF HIS MEETING IN VIENNA WITH SADAT. HIS SENSE OF SADAT'S CONCERN AND MOOD AT THAT TIME MESH VERY CLOSELY WITH ATHERTON'S MORE RECENT MEETING WITH SADAT IN CAIRO, WHICH HAS BEEN REPORTED IN DETAIL. PERES WAS GUARDED PRIMARILY WHEN IT CAME TO REPORTING SADAT'S VIEW OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT AND ITS POSITIONS, ALTHOUGH HE IMPLIED THAT SADAT HAD SAID MANY OF THE SAME THINGS ABOUT BEGIN WHICH WE HAVE HEARD SEPARATELY IN WASHINGTON AND CAIRO.

2. IN ANSWER TO PERES' QUERIES, ATHERTON BRIEFED HIM IN SOME DETAIL ON CURRENT STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, AND ON HIS ASSESSMENT OF
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TEL AV 02656 280859Z

SADAT'S CURRENT MOOD. PERES WAS VERY INTERESTED IN HSSEIN'S SITUATION, BUT ATHERTON MADE CLEAR HE COULD NOT SAY MUCH ABOUT IT UNTIL HE HAD BEEN TO AMMAN.

3. PERES WAS ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHAT THE MAJOR ROADBLOCKS ARE AT PRESENT IN THE NEGOTIATION. ATHERTON STRESSED THE GROWING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISPUTE OVER

INTERPRETATION OF THE WITHDRAWAL PROVISION IN 242, ALONG WITH THE PROBLEM OF THE SETTLEMENTS AND THE MORE GENERAL QUESTION OF FINDING A FORMULA FOR THE PALESTINIAN/WEST BANK PROBLEM.

4. PERES ACKNOWLEDGED READILY THAT THE LABOR GOVERNMENTS HAD ALWAYS INTERPRETED 242 AS APPLYING TO THE WEST BANK AS WELL AS THE SINAI AND THE GOLAN. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY SOMEWHAT SCORNFUL OF BEGIN'S CURRENT EFFORT TO ARGUE THAT ANOTHER INTERPRETATION WAS POSSIBLE.

5. THE PREVIOUS NIGHT AT MY DINNER FOR ROY AND BETTY ATHERTON, ABBA EBAN HAD HELD FORTH AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THIS ISSUE. HE ALSO STATED FIRMLY THAT THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY QUESTION IN HIS MIND OR THAT OF HIS GOVERNMENT WHEN 242 WAS ADOPTED THAT IT REQUIRED AT LEAST SOME WITHDRAWAL ON ALL FRONTS, INCLUDING THE WEST BANK. HE SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS A GREAT MISTAKE FOR THE CURRENT ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO TRY TO ARGUE ON THE BASIS OF "FLAWED JURISPRUDENCE." HE SAID IT WOULD DO NO ONE ANY GOOD TO TRY TO TWIST THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PRECEDENTS IN THIS WAY. EBAN IS PREPARING AN ARTICLE TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE JERUSALEM POST AND MA'ARIV TAKING STRONG ISSUE WITH THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM THAT 242 NEED NOT APPLY TO THE WEST BANK. HE SAID, IN FACT, THAT HE HAD FIRST INTENDED TO MAKE A STATEMENT TO THIS EFFECT IN THE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEL AV 02656 280859Z

KNESSET. HE SUBSEQUENTLY THOUGHT BETTER OF IT, TO PRECLUDE STIMULATING BEGIN TO MAKE A SPEECH IN WHICH HE GOES FIRMLY ON THE PUBLIC RECORD IN DEFENSE OF HIS INTERPRETATION OF 242--THEREBY MAKING IT ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT FOR HIM SUBSEQUENTLY TO CHANGE HIS POSITION.

6. COMMENT: FROM THESE TWO CONVERSATIONS, IT IS CLEAR THAT WE WILL HAVE READY SUPPORT FROM LABOR PARTY LEADERS WHO WERE INTIMATELY INVOLVED WITH EARLIER STAGES OF NEGOTIATION IN ARGUING OUR INTERPRETATION OF THE 242 WITHDRAWAL PROVISIONS. JUST HOW MUCH THIS WILL HELP US WITH BEGIN IS, HOWEVER, AT LEAST HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE.
LEWIS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PEACE PLANS, NEGOTIATIONS, RESOLUTION 242, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TELAV02656
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780091-0449
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978021/aaaaaapf.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e8b1cdcc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3423536
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATIONS WITH PERES AND EBAN CONCERNING RES 242 AND CURRENT STATE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS
TAGS: PBOR, PGOV, MPOL, IS, JO, EG, XF, US, STATE, (PERES, SHIMON), (EBAN, ABBA), (ATHERTON, ALFRED L JR)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e8b1cdcc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014